

Memoranda on Blind Welfare
No. 1

**FIVE WAYS TO
EMPLOYMENT
FOR THE BLIND**

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FIVE WAYS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR THE BLIND

A Report of a Conference held at Broadway, Worcester-shire, October, 1944, on the Beveridge and Tomlinson Reports; the White Papers on National Insurance and on Employment Policy; and the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act.

FOREWORD

ALL who have been concerned with Blind Welfare have long been aware that, despite its comprehensiveness, it had many weaknesses which could hardly be remedied without fresh legislation. In so far as they were able to view Blind Welfare in relationship to other social services, they have seen that any fresh legislation would necessarily be designed to benefit other handicapped persons as well as the blind. The War, which has accelerated so many changes in our social life, has produced social legislation of the most drastic character, and we who are giving ourselves to the service of the blind find ourselves faced by an entirely new situation, in which our primary task is to protect the real interests of the blind—taking account, on the one hand, of the favourable position in which they have already been placed by the Blind Persons Acts, and, on the other, of the plain and irresistible intention of Parliament to bring Blind Welfare into the scope of arrangements for the well-being of all handicapped people.

Directly bearing on recent pronouncements is the fact, proved years ago theoretically and experimentally by the N.I.B.'s Research into employment for the blind, that a great many blind men and women, who, under the system which had developed in the period which lay between the Blind Persons Act of 1920 and the outbreak of the present war had been classified and treated as unemployable, are in fact willing and able to work in open industry to the satisfaction of their employers and workmates and themselves. On the other hand, the uneconomic character of much of the employ-

ment provided by Workshops for the Blind and Home Workers Schemes had become increasingly apparent in that same period. Looking back we can see how grave was the threat to the fundamental principle of Blind Welfare that the blind should be helped to be, not objects of charity, but self-respecting members of the community, cared for in every detail in so far as circumstances made care necessary, but making the full contribution of which they are capable to the economic, social and cultural life of the nation. We should be incredibly foolish, in the light of experience gained before the War and during it, to reject the opportunity now offered of bringing the system of Blind Welfare up to date.

The Report here made deals with one aspect only of Blind Welfare, the vital matter of employment, with incidental references to current proposals for National Insurance. It is made by a number of officials with personal knowledge of employment problems who, realising their responsibility as advisers to Councils and Committees in whose hands decisions on policy lie, thought it desirable to bring together their several points of view in the hope that a constructive general plan might be outlined. They comprise Workshop Managers, members of the Industrial Placement staff of the N.I.B., and our two selves, who are concerned, if we may say so, with the wider problems of Blind Welfare as a whole.

The recommendations here made are offered as a contribution to sound thinking at the present stage of discussion. It is gratifying to record that those who constituted the Conference, which was held at Broadway, Worcestershire, October 27th to 30th, 1944, reached complete agreement after prolonged and ruthlessly realistic examination of their own and each others' views and opinions.

Every organisation for the blind (with the possible exception of some with purely cultural objects) is concerned one way or another with the question of employment. Local Authorities and Voluntary Agencies are responsible for directing blind people, whether they come from schools for the blind or have lost their sight in adult life, towards the means of earning a livelihood. Schools for the blind have at an early age to decide their children's vocational bent. Agencies which conduct workshops and Home Workers Schemes are, of course, intimately concerned with employment. Perhaps the greatest weakness of Blind Welfare in the period now coming to an end was that the term "employment" was tied too tightly to the meaning of workshop employment. The following Report does not by any means suggest that Workshops for the Blind should close their doors, nor that all physically fit blind people should in future be employed in open industry. It does contemplate a great increase in the number of employed blind people, and it recommends ways and means by which the blind may be given a freer choice of occupation than they have had in the past. As the policy here put forward for consideration provides for five distinct methods of employment, it is possible that for convenience of reference it may be known as the "Five-Way" policy and we hope that each of them may be found

practicable for a substantial number of blind people, with their great diversity of ability and inclinations, and that the enlargement of opportunity now made possible may in due time be still further developed.

At all costs we must avoid an employment classification of the blind based on existing machinery and methods, to say nothing of prejudices and vested interests. The danger is, or has been, that the great majority of children educated in schools for the blind, may be directed to Workshop employment *via* training establishments connected either with their School or the Workshop for which they are designated; and that, on the other hand, men and women who lose their sight in adult life may be excluded from Workshop employment and directed to employment in open industry. There are blind people who require sheltered employment; there are others who can only find satisfaction and be normal human creatures through "open employment." Our task is to seize the present opportunity of widening the range of occupations open to the blind, and to give every blind child and every blind adult alike the chance of getting the kind of work for which he is best suited and in which he will find happiness in reaching his maximum of usefulness. We wish, on behalf of the signatories of the Report, to express our thanks to Mr. T. H. Tylor, Chairman of the N.I.B.'s Education and Research Committee, who, at a time when Committee Meetings in London were suspended owing to a plague of flying bombs, readily sanctioned the convening of the Conference which has resulted in this Report; and also to his Committee and the Council of the N.I.B. for undertaking to publish this Report as expressing the views of its signatories. We are no less grateful to the signatories themselves, not only for what we may call the enthusiastic common sense and expertness of knowledge which they contributed to the discussions, but also for the atmosphere of cordial friendliness in which the Conference was conducted from beginning to end.

B. O. PURSE,
Chairman.

W. McG. EAGAR,
Convener.

REPORT

1. The Present Opportunity.

The Disabled Persons (Employment) Act (which for brevity's sake will hereinafter be referred to as "The Act"), and the White Paper on National Insurance both treat blindness as one among many causes of want which a modern community should counter either by insurance or by such preferential treatment in matters of employment as will enable the disabled person to find work and keep it. The present Government's plan for the employment of the Disabled is closely related to its plan for Full Employment after the war. It is designed not only to bring the full working capacity of disabled persons into the war effort—and not only as a humanitarian measure for the welfare of the individuals concerned—but to secure the maximum of industrial output after the war and the minimum of dependency.

The total number of blind persons of working age is only a small fraction of the total employed working population and indeed of the total number of disabled people who come within the scope of the Act. Since the Blind Persons Act of 1920 the blind have been a privileged people, enjoying special advantages derived from a separate system of welfare which, despite certain defects, was superior to the arrangements made for any other disabled persons. None the less, the war has proved that a great many blind people who were capable of employment were not only not employed, but were classified as unemployable, and it has also to be admitted that much of the employment given to the blind in special Workshops and Home Workers Schemes has been uneconomic. The arrangements now contemplated for the employment of the Disabled promise to be both more inclusive and more economic. Blind Welfare has to beware of clinging to the past at the expense of missing present opportunity.

The employment needs of the blind vary widely. Employment policy for the blind must be judged by the variety as well as the quality and quantity of the occupation. Every kind of occupation which any blind person can perform should be included in the scope of the policy. The Act has to be considered in order to see how it can be used for the benefit of the blind, so as to bring into employment those who have been wrongly classified as unemployable, to place in open employment those who could earn more and be happier outside a special Workshop for the Blind and to put Sheltered Workshops on a sounder and more economic basis. Our recommendations are based on the assumptions that the Act will be carried into full operation as soon as possible, and that for a period after the war (which may be anything from 5 to 15 years), there will be Full Employment as anticipated in the Government's White Paper on Employment Policy. As the war has changed the Blind Persons Act outlook, so in time the system envisaged for the post-war period may be altered. It is impossible to look far into the future, but it seems clear to us that

Blind Welfare will be better able to adapt itself to future industrial requirements, if it takes the present opportunity of gaining the widest possible experience and of developing all practical forms of industrial capacity.

2. Sheltered and Open Employment.

The commodities produced by Workshops for the Blind have, for the most part, been hand-made articles which had to be sold in the face of foreign competition and against mass-produced articles serving the same purpose. Capacity to produce them has been found to require a long period of training; their range is extremely limited. Many hundreds of blind people who have now proved their employability were classified as unemployable solely on the ground that they have not been deemed capable of taking prolonged training in the limited number of handicrafts practised in Workshops for the Blind.

The approach of the Act (see in particular Section 15(1)) is very different. It aims at securing the employment of all disabled people who can do a reasonable amount of work of any kind. It contemplates Sheltered Workshops as places for the employment of persons who are precluded from work on their own account, or from open employment, by severe disability, on the ground that "employment on such work would not be available to them or because they would be unlikely to be able to compete therein on terms comparable as respects earnings and security with those enjoyed by persons engaged therein who are not subject to disablement."

In the light of the fact that many blind workers have during the war shown that they can hold their own in open industry, the blind cannot as a class now be judged as suitable only for sheltered employment. In practice most blind people, if given free choice between sheltered and open industry, will choose that which promises the highest wage and the greatest likelihood of continuous employment. On the other hand a number, even of those who might earn a higher wage in open industry, particularly if they have been trained for a Workshop craft, may find more satisfaction in producing complete commodities in a Workshop than in producing identical articles or components by the repetition processes of a modern factory. Apart from personal preference, there is in principle a case for open employment on the ground that it keeps the blind worker in the main stream of normal life.

If sheltered employment for the Disabled generally can be placed on a sound economic footing, as the Act anticipates, Blind Welfare will have to adduce very good reason for continuing to employ the blind in specialist Workshops run at a substantial loss. In a number of cases good reason may exist; but, in the light of the comparisons which will henceforward be made, it is obviously essential that trading loss should be reduced to the minimum. Workshops Managers under peace-time conditions were constantly struggling to reduce trading loss while employing a substantial number of workers of low

output. If they had been able to pick and choose their workmen their problem would have been greatly eased. If Workshops for the Blind could employ only workers with real aptitude for craftsmanship they could justify their continued existence, producing their traditional commodities on a reasonably economic basis and, possibly, extending their range.

Remunerative employment for blind people without aptitude for craftsmanship must be sought in other directions. As we see the lines of future development there are in fact five distinct ways of employment now open or opening to the blind. The following paragraphs of this Memorandum describe them in turn. Briefly they are :—

- A. Handcraft Workshops, *i.e.*, Workshops for skilled craftsmen.
- B. Industrial Workshops.
- C. Disabled Persons Employment Undertakings, *i.e.*, Sheltered Workshops &c under the National Scheme for the Employment of the Disabled.
- D. Open Industry.
- E. Employment on own account.

Note 1.—The types of Workshops distinguished as A, B and C above are all “Sheltered Workshops” in the sense of Section 15 of the Act.

Note 2.—The term “sheltered employment undertakings” includes Home Workers Schemes as well as the Handcraft, Industrial and Disabled Persons Workshops mentioned above.

3. Sheltered Employment Undertakings.

The general distinction between sheltered employment undertakings and open industry is that the production of the former is governed by the primary intention to employ people of a certain type, whereas open industry has the primary intention of producing commodities, drawing its labour from the general labour market.

A. Handcraft Workshops.—The Handcraft Workshop would be the existing type of Workshop for the Blind raised to the higher economic level required by the new conditions. It would employ men and women who have proved themselves competent in their particular crafts and, as time goes on, young people or newly blinded people who have the necessary aptitude for craftsmanship and prefer workshop employment to open industry. It will, in the first instance, concentrate on the trades which have proved to be reasonably economic when employing competent craftsmen. It should never incur large Trading Losses; it might even pay its way if it has preference in public orders under the arrangements suggested in Section 91 of the Tomlinson Report.

B. Industrial Workshops.—The Industrial Workshop will offer a wide range of repetition work to blind people who have no marked

craftsmanship skill but are not suited to open industry. It will either undertake sub-contracts (whether for industrial concerns or in conjunction with other sheltered employment undertakings as part of arrangements made by the proposed Public Corporation), or it will manufacture complete components. It will require good business management. If the employees reach war-time levels of production, it should be self-supporting. The initial cost of buildings and plant will be considerable, but such an undertaking once established should provide employment for a large number of blind persons, that cost should be met as a sound investment for the Welfare of the Blind; the Ministry of Labour is enabled by the Act to defray or contribute towards such initial costs.

Note.—Handcraft Workshops and Industrial Workshops might be managed as different Departments of one employment undertaking for the blind. Combination of the two types of Workshop under one management would have definite advantages in saving overheads and in providing certain services common to the two Departments. On occasion it might be possible to compensate slackness of work in the Handcraft Department by providing employment in the Industrial Workshop Department. The Workshops for the Blind in Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Leicester have already developed along these lines.

C. Disabled Persons Employment Undertakings.—Employment in Workshops established for disabled persons in general will be of particular value to blind persons whose needs cannot be met by a local Workshop for the Blind or Home Workers Scheme, and it will give opportunity also to blind people who have specialist skill, which cannot be made use of in a Workshop or Home Workers Scheme for the blind only, and to any blind men or women who suffer from an added disability, *e.g.*, crippling, which might be best catered for in a Workshop providing special facilities for overcoming that particular disability.

4. Co-Employment.

There has been much prejudice in the past against what is inaccurately termed “dilution” of blind labour in Workshops for the Blind. The Tomlinson Report and the present proposals put what should now be termed “co-employment” in a new light. Co-employment in this context is the complementary employment of workers of diverse disabilities. Theoretically it offers great advantages, but there has in the past been little practical experimentation. It appears desirable from the point of view of the blind, in so far as it increases the range of available employment, puts larger earnings within the reach or improves working conditions generally. By increasing the size of industrial units, development along co-employment lines would reduce overheads and facilitate mass-production. In Handcraft Workshops for the Blind disabled workers with sight could do the

finishing work for which able-bodied sighted staff has now to be employed.

Although Handcraft Workshops and Industrial Workshops are primarily to be regarded as industrial undertakings for the blind, they would admit of a certain degree of co-employment. Co-employment would be the basis of employment in disabled persons' Workshops.

5. Employment in Open Industry.

The new conditions, created by the Act, which favour the employment of the blind are :—

1. Firms with a permanent staff of more than 20 employees will be required to engage a Quota of disabled persons as vacancies occur. The Act does not decide the size of the Quota, but provides that it may differ as between different industries.
2. Certain types of occupations will be named "designated employments" (in the Tomlinson Report, "Scheduled occupations"), *i.e.*, jobs for which disabled persons must be engaged if they are available. The definition of the Act (Section 12(1)) is "such classes of employment as appear to him" (the Minister of Labour and National Service) "to afford specially suitable opportunities for the employment of blind and other Disabled Persons." To take advantage of these opportunities, it is essential that Blind Welfare should be equipped with adequate facilities for rehabilitation and a comprehensive well co-ordinated service for training, placement and industrial after-care.

6. The Placement Service.

Experience in this country and in America indicates that a placement service will be fully successful only if staffed by specialists who combine a wide knowledge of industry with an intimate knowledge of the blind and their capabilities. The problem differs from, and in many respects is more difficult than, that of placing disabled persons with sight. Unless an employer receives the advice of a specialist who can give a practical demonstration of the capacity of a blind or partially sighted worker, he is strongly inclined to put blind employees on to the least skilled and, consequently, worst paid, jobs in the factory. The Placement Officer must break down the prejudice which results in blind labour being regarded as inferior and convince employers, foremen and fellow workers that the blind worker is worth his place on his own merits.

The administration of the Act is a function of the Ministry of Labour. There are 10 Ministry of Labour Regions in England and Wales and one in Scotland. In every Regional Office there is a senior official who is responsible for the general problem of the resettlement of the Disabled and in every Employment Exchange there is a specially selected officer (called the Disablement Rehabilitation Officer) who advises disabled persons in regard to vocational

training and employment. The number of blind persons in any Region will be too small to justify the appointment of Ministry of Labour Officers for the Blind alone, or for that matter any other specific group of disabled people. On the other hand, the number of blind in each area is large enough to compel Blind Welfare to safeguard their interest. That can best be done, we are convinced, by appointing a Blind Persons Employment Officer in each of the Ministry regions to work in liaison with the Regional Disabled Persons Officer and with any members of the local Exchange staffs who are directly concerned with the placement of disabled persons. Experience has already proved that one Placement Officer can do effective after-care only for a limited number of blind employees; it may be necessary to appoint more than one Blind Persons Employment Officer in the larger Ministry of Labour Regions.

The question at once arises who is to appoint, pay and direct this new service of B.P.E. Officers? There are no units of Blind Welfare organisation corresponding to the M/L Regions. In some of the Regions, however, there is virtual correspondence with the area served by a powerful general Agency for the Blind, or a group of such Agencies, one of whose functions is already industrial. The B.P.E.O.s must work in the closest co-operation with all Blind Welfare Agencies which are concerned with the blind of the area. They must be in touch with each other and with some central organisation for employment-research and development. For years past the N.I.B. has carried out research work into employment of the blind and has placed a considerable number of blind people in occupations outside the Workshops and Home Workers Schemes. It has done a great deal during the war to encourage the placement of blind workers in open industry and has itself effected a large number of placements. It has recently enlarged its staff by the appointment of blind or semi-blind Placement Officers.

Our conclusion is that wherever possible a local industrial Agency for the Blind or a group of such Agencies should undertake to appoint and direct a Regional B.P.E. Officer. Where the organisation of Blind Welfare does not permit such an appointment, it should be made by the N.I.B. The B.P.E.O.s, by whomever appointed and directed, should work together as a team and maintain continued contact with the N.I.B.'s Placement Department, which in its turn would maintain continuous contact with the M/L. It is obvious that the exact method of co-operation between Agencies for the Blind, local and national, and the M/L will have to be carefully worked out. We would emphasise only that this new service is vitally important to the Welfare of the Blind throughout the country; that Blind Welfare organisation must adapt itself to the administrative structure of the Ministry of Labour; that the experience gained in one area must be shared with others, and that there must be a common Centre for advice, research and experimental development.

7. Employment on Own Account.

Provision for employment on own account is greatly to be desired, in some cases because the nature of the disability makes a "contractual occupation" impossible and in others because a disabled person may have a definite preference for independence. The Tomlinson Report instances the fact that "a certain number of blind persons have been found capable of running small businesses—an activity which makes for independence and helps to reduce the burden on the ordinary blind industries," and, it continues, "there is much to be said for the institution of special measures to assist disabled persons to employment on their own account where that promises to be the most satisfactory form of resettlement." The Act makes no specific provision for this type of occupation, but the general powers conferred on the Minister by the Act enable him to give substantial assistance in a variety of ways as yet unspecified. In the past a substantial number of blind people have been employed on their own account, a number of them continuing occupations for which they had been trained and in which they were already engaged, before they lost their sight. There has also been a certain number of occupations practised by people who were trained for them after losing their sight, *e.g.*, massage, poultry-farming, kiosk- and shop-keeping, to say nothing of such professional occupations as the Church, law, administration, etc., which to a large extent are employment on own account. We are unanimous in thinking that entry into such occupations should be encouraged, and we would emphasise in particular that the first task of a Blind Welfare Agency in dealing with men or women who lose sight in adult life is to make every effort to enable them to continue their former way of living. It must be the constant aim of Blind Welfare generally to enlarge the range of occupations in which blind people can prove their capacity by earning a livelihood and achieving some measure of independence. The two essentials for success in this direction are facilities for training and in some cases financial assistance. As social services go, Blind Welfare is well-to-do; finance need never be an obstacle. We know of no instance where a possible opening has been baulked by lack of means for training. The best means, however, have not always been found, and it is important to emphasise that all placements of this kind must result from finding the job for the individual, not from shaping the individual to the job.

8. Administration of Sheltered Employment Undertakings.

Under Section 15 of the Act Workshops for the Blind may be administered in one of the following three ways:—

- I. As departments of Local Authorities, *i.e.*, fully municipalised workshops;
- II. As voluntary agents of one or more Local Authorities;
- III. As voluntary bodies recognised by the Ministry of Labour.

The choice between these possibilities must be made on economic, not political, grounds. It must be governed also by the essential need for bringing Workshops for the Blind into the main stream of development under the new Act. That development will be towards an integrated system of employment for all the disabled, nationally co-ordinated and wholly divorced from welfare services and the care of the unemployable. It would be possible for the Company to be set up under Section 15 of the Act to establish Workshops for the Blind similar to those to be established for the benefit of other groups of disabled persons, but it does not seem likely that, with so many forms of organisation for Blind Welfare already in the field, this method will be used.

Local Authorities are not required to undertake any responsibility for the employment of any class of disabled people. The power to provide sheltered employment for the blind (I. above) is a legacy of 1920. Local Authorities were then given responsibility for Workshops for the Blind for two reasons, the first that the employment of the blind was regarded as incidental to Blind Welfare in general, the second that those Workshops had to be supported by the Rates.

Many Workshops for the Blind have established friendly and co-operative relations with the local authorities whose agents they have been under the Blind Persons Acts. There has, however, been a constant danger, more acute in some places than in others, of economic considerations being subordinate to political issues. The new economic outlook on the employment of the blind and the fact that financial support will in future be given by the M/L makes a powerful case for relieving Local Authorities of a responsibility which is, in many respects, alien to their normal functions. A proper relationship will have to be established between the Employment Exchange system and the Local Authorities and Agencies responsible for maintaining the Register of the Blind : but that presents no particular difficulty; similar relationships exist in other connections. Moreover, the retention by Local Authorities of industrial functions for the blind alone would seriously impair any prospect of making co-employment of the blind with other disabled persons effective.

Our conclusion, then, is that the interests of the blind persons concerned would be best secured by making Workshops for the Blind an integral part of the economic system for the disabled set up by the M/L, so that they would receive recognition and direct assistance from it.

Both Handcraft Workshops and Industrial Workshops, as defined in Sections A and B above, could be administered in any one of the three ways set out in this section. Grants would be payable to either type under Section 15(5) of the Act. The form of grant has not yet been decided, but it might follow the line of the Ministry of Labour's interim scheme of grants, which covers :—

- i. The provision of training facilities;
- ii. Trading losses;
- iii. Approved capital expenditure.

The marketing of the commodities made would be greatly simplified in a number of cases if Workshops for the Blind, of whatever type, could be given preference as proposed in the Tomlinson Report in the production of goods required for Government and other public services. Nothing is specifically provided on this point in the Act, but the wide powers conferred on the M/L would enable it to give such advantages to Workshops for the disabled generally if it finds it practicable to do so.

9. Vocational Training.

Under Section 2(3) of the Act, Training Courses may be provided by either official or Voluntary Agencies. The responsibility for training rests primarily on the Ministry of Labour, but the Ministry is authorised to "make arrangements" with other Government Departments, *e.g.*, the Ministry of Agriculture or the Ministry of Education, or with other persons, or bodies of persons. The Ministry may meet the whole, or part, of the cost incurred by the Agency, official or voluntary, with which such an arrangement is made. These provisions make it possible for the blind to be trained in Centres provided exclusively for them; or in Centres for disabled persons in general; or in industrial Training establishments for the able-bodied as well as the disabled. The advantages, or disadvantages, of each of these methods have to be considered in relation to training:—(1) Adults, and (2) Adolescents after leaving Schools for the Blind, in both cases whether for sheltered or open employment.

Training for sheltered employment can, in our view, be given by the Training Departments of Workshops for the Blind, if they can adapt themselves to the new conditions. They will need additional plant and equipment and instructors competent to cover a wider range of operations and trades. The emphasis placed in the Tomlinson Report, and in other present day discussions on rehabilitation, on the need for producing trainees who have not only acquired some skill but also capacity to do a full week's work, will inevitably be reflected in the tone and tempo of training establishments for the blind. It is likely also to have an effect in reducing the period of training, at least in some trades. The period of training for prospective employees for industrial Workshops may be devoted more to building up speed and stamina than to acquisition of skill.

Training for open industry should also aim at accustoming the blind trainee to the tempo and general requirements of factory life. It should include instruction in the use of adapted precision instruments and in the general principles of hand assembly and machine operations. Such training can, in our view, best be given in a Ministry of Labour centre. In so far as the blind should be accustomed to working in teams with sighted employees, training should, where possible, be given in a centre not exclusively limited to the blind.

Those who are responsible for the education of blind children must also take account of the emphasis referred to above, which is now placed on the industrial character of training for industry. Physical separation from the Schools in which their childhood has been spent is necessary for adolescents who are about to enter industrial life, but, before starting industrial training, the blind adolescent would, in our view, immensely benefit by a year's continued education which would have no more vocational bias than the County Colleges to be established under the new Education Act. Its aim would be to cultivate manual dexterity and to widen the range of experience, interests and contacts. At the end of the extra year the blind young person should be fitter and better able to take advantage of the Training Course than if he had entered on it immediately on leaving School at 16. It is of particular importance that during that year and in subsequent years blind trainees should have the widest possible contacts with sighted young people of their own age. We hope that all who are concerned with the welfare of the blind young person will give thought to this idea; it has not previously been put forward but we found ourselves unanimously in agreement when it was suggested.

10. Augmentation of Earnings.

In para. 146 of Part I of the White Paper on National Insurance the Government proposes that supplementary allowances to the blind, whether in the form of augmentation of earnings or of extra benefits for the unemployable, should be met on a means test from National Assistance. This proposal must result in the same abuses which followed the introduction of the minimum wage at a number of workshops. It would destroy the individual's incentive to achieve maximum out-put or to seek higher grade work, and it would be inconsistent with the whole plan of making workshops more efficient and of opening a wider range of operations to the blind.

The proposal, moreover, would create an undesirable distinction between the Ex-Service and industrially blinded, on the one hand, whose pensions would not be affected by earnings, and the rest of the blind working community, on the other, to whom increased earnings would mean reduced allowances. Since all types of blind people will be working together in sheltered workshops and at the factory bench, such a differentiation would not fail to cause grievance on both sides. There might be a case on actuarial grounds for giving the victims of industrial accident an increased benefit, but there can be none for administering their pensions on a wholly different principle from that applied to those disabled by other causes.

The Government's reason for rejecting the "partial incapacity allowance," viz., that it is difficult to assess degrees of incapacity, carries little conviction, as it anticipates no difficulty in a similar assessment for workmens' compensation purposes. The case for including a Partial Incapacity Allowance as part of a general social insurance scheme is at least as strong as that for granting an atten-

dant's allowance under the revised system of workmens' compensation (see White Paper on National Insurance, Part II, para. 42).

Experience in this and other countries confirms that the subsistence needs of the blind are greater than those of the seeing. This was the reason for the Blind Persons Acts of 1920 and 1938, and has been taken into consideration in the social insurance legislation of Australia and New Zealand. It may be true that in some forms of employment these extra costs cannot be accurately computed, but there is no exception to the rule that blindness restricts opportunity. A blind factory-worker may earn as much as his seeing fellow-worker, but his skill and energy would have given him an even higher output or a better position if he had had his sight. He may, for example, be an efficient machine operator, but he can never become a general engineer. The Act is itself a recognition of this limitation, but the protection it affords cannot equalise opportunity as between the disabled and the able-bodied, or as between those suffering from different disablements.

For these reasons we recommend that the blind and other handicapped persons, who suffer both from extra costs of living and decreased earning power, should receive Disability Increment to be paid at a flat rate from the National Insurance Fund in addition to National Insurance benefits or earnings.

Signatories.

- J. CHAMBERLAIN, Superintendent and Secretary, Wolverhampton Institution for the Blind.
- W. MCG. EAGAR, Secretary-General, National Institute for the Blind.
- H. S. EDKINS, General Superintendent and Secretary, Birmingham Royal Institution for the Blind.
- C. B. FOX, Director, Henshaw's Institution for the Blind, Manchester.
- J. GOSNEY, Assistant Secretary, Birmingham Royal Institution for the Blind.
- E. W. PAGE, Industrial Placement Officer, National Institute for the Blind.
- A. PLATT, Secretary and Manager, Hull Institute for the Blind.
- B. O. PURSE, late Hon. General Secretary, National Association of Blind Workers.
- S. W. STARLING, Secretary, Association for General Welfare of the Blind, Tottenham Court Road, London, W.
- J. F. WILSON, Assistant Secretary, National Institute for the Blind.

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AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND
15 WEST 16th STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10011